ANCIENT SKIES

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THE GREAT ELEPHANT CONTROVERSY

BY GENE M. PHILLIPS*

If it "looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck - it's a duck!" So says the new Bush Administration in Washington when discussing the question of whether taxes would be increased in disguise - by imposing user fees and other forms of revenue enhancement without calling them taxes.

But not so with elephants. If it looks like an elephant it must be something else, at least if it is carved in stone and is found at a Maya ruin in Central America. Why? Because there were no elephants in Central America in ancient times, and if there were no elephants,how could a Mayan have carved a stone in the shape of an elephant's head and trunk? Ergo, it must be something else - a serpent, or a demon, or entwined foliage, or some stylized representation of the after-life - anything but an elephant! So goes the convoluted reasoning of many archaeologists who prefer even a stupid explanation to the obvious one.

Because classical archaeology fails to recognize the fact that there was world-wide intercourse among the peoples of the Earth in ancient times, it has great difficulty in explaining away things that were found where they should not be. A classic example is the Crystal Skull of Lubaantun. (See Ancient Skies 8:5). The perfect human skull with a removable lower jawbone fashioned in pure crystal was found in Belize (formerly British Honduras) in the Yucatan Peninsula by Anna Mitchell-Hedges on an expedition in 1927 with her father Frederick A. Mitchell-Hedges. But what was the skull doing in Mayaland? Mitchell-Hedges theorized that the skull was produced by the technologically-advanced, super civilization of Atlantis, but he was quickly shot down for this idea.

The establishment's arguments ran like this:since there was no Atlantis, and since the Maya did not possess the technology to produce the skull, then someone must have brought the skull to Belize and planted it there, to make a big production out of finding it. And that someone was none other than Mitchell-Hedges himself. Now really! Where could Mitchell-Hedges have gotten a perfect anatomical model of a human skull, with a working lower jaw, carved in life size out of one piece of perfect crystal? In 1927?

The scientists refuse to accept the argument that a highly-developed,technological civilization could have existed on Earth in the remote past with sufficient capability to produce the crystal skull;and even less can they accept the argument that it may have been produced by intelligent beings from outer space and brought to Earth in pre-history. No,these theories are too wild to be accepted.

Another example of contorted reasoning by scientists is Carl Sagan's explanation as to how the Dogons of Mali in West Africa came to know all about the Sirius star system. The astronomer's simple explanation: missionaries told them. How the missionaries happened to possess this information hundreds of years before modern astronomy learned it,he does not bother to explain.

But,we are straying from the elephant track,which we find at the Maya site of Copan, in remote western Honduras in Central America. Remote because it is difficult to reach. Most people visit Copan in one day by private motorcoach from Guatemala City - a long, tiresome journey. The Guatemala-Honduras border crossing is exasperating. Passports must be checked and re-checked by the authorities until finally all "irregularities" are "corrected." But first, everyone must vacate the bus while the Honduran border guards fumigate the interior to make sure that no Guatemalan insects are carried over the imaginary borderline. Incidentally, on the way back, the Guatemalan border guards fumigate the bus again to keep the Honduran insects out of Guatemala. Of course, if the insects of either country wanted to migrate to the other, they would not need to take a bus.

Because of the distance from Guatemala City and the poor condition of the roads, most visitors to Copan are left with only two or three hours at the ruins, and one of these is spent having lunch. If obtained locally, the lunch will consist of one hard-boiled egg (of indeterminate vintage) and a chicken sandwich, which is a piece of fried chicken (bone and all) between two slices of stale bread. If you are lucky your sandwich may contain a chicken foot - a delicacy in those parts.

To have more time at the ruins,our Society Member Expedition to Copan arranged to spend two nights in the small village of Copan, just a stone's throw from the archaeological site. The travel agent's hotel guide listed two or three hotels in Copan. We selected the Marina. The description sounded great. We had envisioned it as being at water's edge, with small pleasure craft moored nearby, and perhaps a cozy restaurant overlooking the marina itself. In truth, the Marina Hotel was the only hotel in town and the nearest water was the Copan River, at least a half mile away. There was precious little water in the hotel and no electricity, except from 6PM to 9PM. We had to share our room with a colony of big, black beetles, but they were as afraid of us as we were of them so they huddled together in the drawer of the nightstand between the two beds. One look at the bedclothes and we decided it was best to sleep in our clothing. After a cold, dark, sleepless

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night we were eager to see the dawn and when the local hardware store opened, we fortified ourselves with flashlights, candles and matches for the second night. But, of course, our visit to Copan was a few years ago, so hopefully the Marina has improved since then.Maybe they have even piped in water from the Copan River.

So,for the benefit of future travellers to Copan, there is an excellent motel near Rio Hondo in Guatemala. After a leisurely drive from Guatemala City, visiting some sites on the way, you can spend the first night at Rio Hondo. Early next morning, after an hour's drive, allowing for the border crossing and fumigation, you arrive at the archaeological site for a full day at the ruins (with an hour off for the chicken-foot sandwich), and return to Rio Hondo in late afternoon for a relaxing swim in the motel's Olympic-size swimming pool and enjoy an excellent dinner in pleasant surroundings. Next day, you can take an hour's drive along the Motagua River to the ruins of Quirigua in Guatemala, where you will have plenty of time to examine the enigmatic stelae there before returning to Guatemala City the same day.

There is an alternate means of visiting Copan. You can fly to Tegucigalpa,the capital city of Honduras and hire a small plane to take you to the Copan ruins. There is a grassy airstrip hard by the entrance to the site. You can also fly in from San Pedro Sula in northwestern Honduras.

But, again, back to the elephant.

In 1839, John Lloyd Stephens,the American lawyer-explorer and his architect-illustrator friend, Frederick Catherwood,discovered the ruins at Copan. (The Spanish conquistador, Diego Garcia de Palacio, "first" discovered the ruins in 1576 and described them in a letter to King Philip II).

Having been schooled in the principle that the Americas were inhabited by the "rudest Indians" who had made no progress towards civilization, Stephens was astonished to find buried in the jungle structures and stone sculptures which could have been produced only by talented artisans. He exclaimed: "savages never reared these structures, savages never carved these stones." When he asked the local inhabitants who made them, the answer was a dull: "Quien sabe?" (who knows?)

Stephens was so impressed with the sophistication of the Copan ruins that he meticulously measured every stone "idol" and "altar" and with the aid of Catherwood, made detailed surveys of the structures and produced a plan to scale of the entire site. He asked Catherwood to sketch over fifty of the stone carvings. Using a camera lucida (light chamber),the artist Catherwood was able to reflect the image of his subject onto a sheet of paper, so he could trace the outlines and details of the object. By this method, Catherwood was able to produce uncanny detail of the sculptures, surpassing even many photographs of the same figures.

One of the stone "idols", designated by Stephens as "Monument N" (later called "Stela B" by the archaeologists), was measured at twelve feet high, four feet wide on one side and three feet four inches on the other. Stephens noted that "the two ornaments at the top (of Monument N) appear like the trunk of an elephant, an animal unknown in that country." (See Figure 1). Thus began the great elephant controversy which raged in archaeological circles for almost one hundred years.

Not only the "elephant stela", but also certain glyphs, reliefs in stucco and architectural embellishments on the corners of some Mayan buildings seemed to be representations of elephants. In an article written in 1927, Sir Grafton Elliot Smith, concluded that the controversy was settled "once for all." He reported that new evidence had come to light which consisted of bas-reliefs at Palenque which unmistakably depicted elephants:"...the accuracy of the representation of the elephant's head,

Figure 1. Frederick Catherwood's drawing of Stela B (Monument N) at Copan made in 1839.

either in profile views or in the front view...the lozenge-shaped form of the open mouth, the cut stumps of the tusks, and the markings of the under-surface of the trunk are all quite distinctive of the elephant." Further, since some scholars had insisted that what was being represented was a stylized tapir,an animal indigenous to Central America, Dr. Smith pointed out that in one of the Palenque slabs, both the elephant and a tapir were represented. In discussing the "elephant stela" of Copan, Dr. Smith had this to say:

"The peculiar headdress of the central figure presents features distinctive of Java and Indo-China. Both in the ancient sculptures of Boro-budur, in Java, and in the Cambodian temples, a headdress such as is shown here is worn, as it still is by the Emperor of Annam. The most distinctive feature of this particular stela is the upper left-hand corner, which seems to be a conventionalised picture of an Indian elephant with a rider bending forwards on it, and also wearing an Indian turban. The mode of conventionalising the ear is found also in Asia, from India to Java; and the peculiar method of conventionalising the tusk and the under-surface of the trunk by two areas with cross-hatching, introduces exactly the methods employed by the Eastern Asiatic artists - in particular, those of China - at a time correponding to that in which these American sculptures were made."

Dr. Smith was working from a drawing of Stela B made by Dr. Alfred P. Maudslay, the English archaeologist who visited Copan some 40 years after Stephens and Catherwood were there. (See Figure 2). The "rider" referred to by Dr. Smith can clearly be seen in the Maudslay drawing, as well as another turbanned figure immediately underneath the trunk at the left top corner of the stela.Both the mahout (elephant driver) and the other figure can be seen in Catherwood's drawing of Stela B (Monument N).

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Now move the clock forward one hundred years from Maudslay's time and let's have another look at Stela B. (See Figures 3 and 4). See,the mahout is missing! When Stephens found the monument 150 years ago it was standing erect on its seven foot square stone platform. The top right corner of the column was missing then,but otherwise the stela was intact.

In 1881, when Maudslay visited Copan, Stela B was still in the same condition as when Stephens found it. Today, the stela still stands erect but now the top left corner is missing, and the turbanned figure underneath the left trunk is also missing. Two pieces of evidence which would leave little doubt about the elephant connection, the mahout and the small turbanned figure, are both now missing! The other small figures which are still on the stela are obviously Mayan.

I am not accusing the archaeologists of deliberately destroying evidence which would be damaging to their position, but if they did, it would not be the first time that unfavorable evidence was destroyed by an overzealous advocate.

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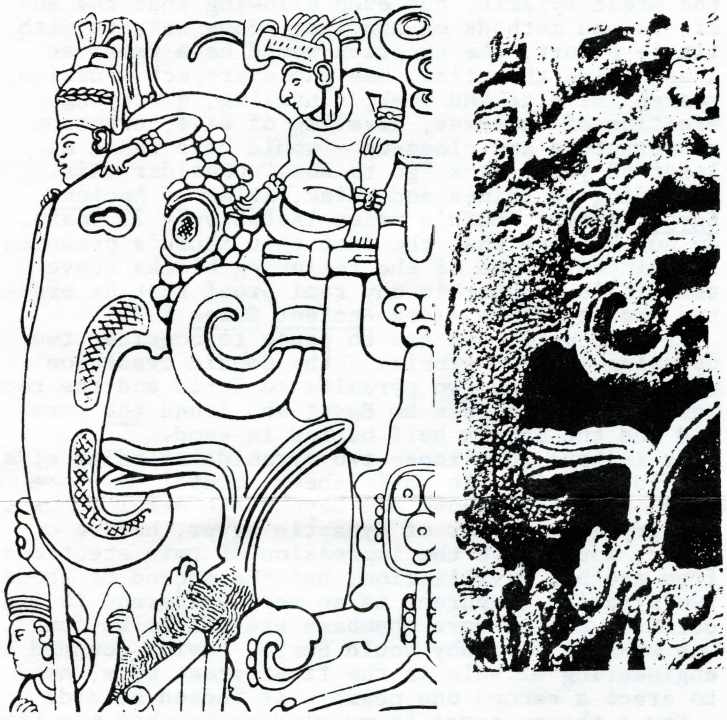

Figure 2. Dr. Alfred P. Maudslay's drawing of the left top corner of Stela B made in 1881-1882. At right is Maudslay's photo of the same area.

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Figure 3. Stela B as it appears today. Photo by Gene M. Phillips.

Figure 4. Close-up of top of Stela B showing that the left top corner is now missing and the turbanned figure which once was below the elephant's trunk is also missing. Photo by Gene M. Phillips.

PYRAMID THOUGHTS

BY EDWIN BRITON*

At age 85 my mind has not yet begun to crumble and my recollections of Egypt are still as crystal clear as when I lived there from 1921 to 1926, although now well overlaid by all that I have learned since. If I had to select one outstanding aspect of the extremely rich field of ancient Egypt, then without doubt the Great Pyramid, with all its surrounding indications, has caused me more thought than any other. Yet, nowhere in all my reading have I seen a full engineering sequence made of that tremendous pile of masonry, attributed to the Pharaoh Khufu (Cheops).

When I was in Egypt, a Coptic priest told me the Masoudi story of the Pharaoh Surid (circa 1,490 BC) who foresaw that some great cataclysm was due to disrupt the Solar System some 500 years hence.

Surid's civilization was well acquainted with those "comings down" which are retained in race memory: Of the "coming down" to Earth of the Sumerians and their kingship lines which reigned for thousands of years before the Great Flood. Of the "coming down" of Poseidon, who with his team, took for his lot that great island (Atlantis) beyond the Pillars of Hercules. Of the "coming down" of those Watchers (the sons of God) as described in the Book of Enoch and also mentioned in Manetho's Aegyptica.Evidently there was interplanetary travel which would have made them totally familiar with the astronomy of Surid's time, so he knew what was coming. Probably some vast body or comet on a collision course with Planet 5, then out between Mars and Jupiter, in whose orbit is now a mass of detritus and minor planets circling the Sun.

Surid knew that even if Planet 5 were the target, Mars, Luna and Terra would all get at least a good shaking, so he called his engineers and architects together and ordered them to design and erect a structure which could withstand any major shakeup, short of total destruction of the Earth. After discussing the future threat that was in store for mankind, the team beat around sundry proposals, finally settling on the pyramidal form, of which there was probably precedent on Mars, which almost certainly was inhabited in eons past. Surid instructed his team to build in chambers and to enshrine therein all the knowledge of their time, for the future use of any civilizations which may develop after the coming cataclysm.

The experts then settled down to totally design the pyramid in every last detail - which types of stone to use, what chambers would be included and their locations, the tunnels, the size and shape, the mathematics, the facing - everything from the ground up had to be determined before one block of stone was set in place. A precise estimate of the ultimate weight of the structure had to be determined because they could not stand a mass of over 6 million tons of masonry just any old where.

A suitable site was found on a plateau which is now Ghizeh (Giza), less than one mile from the Nile, but then it was necessary to determine if the rocky outcrop was bedrock, or just a thin shaft of rock. They tunneled down a decline at an angle of 26° to a depth of about 100 feet and excavated a chamber near the center of the area to be covered by the structure. They then sank a vertical shaft from the chamber still deeper into the rock some 40 feet, and then stopped, evidently satisfied that they were in bedrock.

There was plenty of limestone at Ghizeh for the bulk of the filler blocks, but search parties travelled 500 miles up the Nile to Assuan (Aswan) to find the red granite for certain interior places. The tremendous task of transporting huge 40 ton slabs of granite from Aswan down the Nile to Cairo had to be solved and special rafts were designed. The fine limestone for the facing slabs was found near Cairo on the east bank of the Nile River.

The next obstacle was to design a means to move the red granite slabs and the facing stones from the landing point at Cairo to the Ghizeh Plateau. The solution was a causeway 3,000 feet long, 60 feet wide and at some places, 48 feet high. Herodotus, the 5th Century BC Greek historian, reckoned that the building of the causeway was a work of no less accomplishment than the pyramid itself and took 10 years to build.

While the causeway was being built, the solid rock of the pyramid site was being leveled to a square of 250m (820 feet) along each side.The base of the pyramid itself was to be 230m (754.5 feet) square. The total error of level of the entire area of over 13 acres from corner to corner was less than one inch. The 2 1/2 ton limestone filler blocks were quarried at the pyramid site.

All the special granite slabs and blocks had to be on the site before more than one layer of filler blocks was laid. When the first layer, about 4 feet thick, was completed, the red granite blocks had to be placed on it and then moved up as each layer was completed. Also, the ascending passage, the Grand Gallery and the other tunnels and chambers, all had to be built in as the structure grew. The white limestone casing slabs had to be stacked on the steps ready for downward finishing. As to the theories that the huge stones were hauled up on ramps of sand and mud brick, anyone who has lived and worked in that desert would know that such suggestions were born of ignorance of the conditions.

Herodotus was told that it took 20 years to build the Great Pyramid, but even allowing that the ancients had methods of handling heavy weights with little effort, the erection would have taken at least twice that time. The whole project - design, search for site and rock, tunneling, quarrying, erection of causeway, leveling of site, erection of structure and clean-up - would have taken at least 60 years from "go to woe." Consider this. According to Baines and Malek, Atlas of Ancient Egypt (1980), Khufu's reign lasted only 23 years. I do not believe that the fact that Khufu's prenomen is painted on one of the relieving blocks above the King's Chamber is any real proof that he erected the structure. (See Ancient Skies 8:2)

At this point one has to pause to consider two opposing ancient stories - the Coptic tradition which attributes two pyramids to Surid and the race memory of travellers to Egypt who found the pyramid and the Sphinx half buried in sand.

It is true that those two pyramids standing side by side, similar in their sheer, brutal, awesome mass, seemingly above and beyond the attainments of any pryamid builder of dynastic Egypt, before or after, would give the impression of twin erections from another civilization. But the second of those two pyramids (Kephren) is so very different in its details, unless more chambers are yet to be found. One wonders why. Why would Surid, having founded an engineering miracle in the first great pile, need to erect a second one nearby, if indeed he did?

Now a theory comes to my mind as to what may have taken place in the early dynasties of the ancient Egypt we know. From Surid's time forward until the culmination in the second pyramid at Ghizeh during Kephren's time, there was a continuous devotion by some twenty-odd Pharaohs to try to duplicate the challenge of the ancient one - the Great Pyramid.

There are many more pyramids along the Nile River, but it is significant to note that none, none, even approach the standard of engineering set by either of the two large Ghizeh pyramids. Most are little more than mulloch heaps now. I am convinced that when this old Earth is no longer inhabited, and is a wind-driven desert like Mars, those two huge pyramids will still be standing there.

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